DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 055 512 FL 002 645

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TITLE Individualization of Foreign Language Learning in America, III.
INSTITUTION West Chester State Coll., Pa.
PUB DATE Dec 71
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Behavioral Objectives; Curriculum Design; *Individualized Instruction; Instructional Design; *Instructional Program Divisions; *Language Instruction; Modern Languages; Program Descriptions; Schedule Modules; Second Language Learning; *Student Centered Curriculum; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This compilation of articles on the individualization of foreign language learning examines the teacher's role as the "facilitator of learning" in a student centered curriculum, the nature and direction of present trends in individualized instruction determined at the Stanford Conference on Individualization of Instruction in Foreign Language Study (1971), and the Triadic Method of Least Resistance proposed by Leon Jakobovits in his article on developing procedural steps in individualizing instruction. One article is devoted to a discussion of the program and success of individualized instruction at John Dewey High School in Brooklyn, New York. (RL)

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INDIVIDUALIZATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN AMERICA

III. DECEMBER, 1971

A Special Note on Teacher Training

Every individual learns at some rate which seems to be best for his own capacity. Often, human beings become impatient with their learning rates--Americans especially--attributing to the competitive learning pace much of the high level of technology they have reached.

How impatient should Americans continue to be with the learning pace of most students? How competitive should Americans keep formal learning situations? Given the mood of a seriously disturbed society, it would seem that learning is the important thing, not haste, not outdoing one another. If we assess this mood correctly, perhaps America is reexamining its priorities in these matters. If so, we think that the individualization of instruction represents the best chance we have to reorder educational priorities sensibly.

Individualization of instruction cannot occur on any impressive scale until and unless there is a reformation in teacher education. Understandably, new teachers are entering the profession with mass-mode attitudes and mass-mode teaching techniques. They are imbued with the need for haste and competition, and with the need for imposing educational objectives on students, willing or not.

Since we think it is probably true that most self-pacing students will learn more slowly and less efficiently without a good teacher than with one, we earnestly support the education of good facilitators of individualized instruction. We urge professors of education in colleges and universities to speed the day when "facilitator of learning" does not sound like a pretentious synonym for "teacher". When that day comes, and all teaching is the facilitation of learning, every child could learn at his optimum pace. He will do so because he has a teacher who knows what the goals of instruction are or can be for him, who can help him understand them, who believes in his ability to control his own learning processes, and who is trained in the management of student-centered instruction. In this issue, the reader will find some expressions of critical need in the training of teachers for individualized instruction.

Again we invite comments and contributions from all educational levels of our profession. It remains our conviction that individualization of foreign language instruction must be a non-doctrinaire, grassroots movement to be effective in America.

Edited by:

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Success Philosophy: One Approach to Individualization

At Kenston High School near Cleveland, Ohio, we have developed what is probably a unique foreign language program and an unusual approach to individualization. The program is unique in that it combines the no-failure, success philosophy of Dr. William Glasser's Schools Without Failure[1] with the use of the audio-visual method and multi-media materials of the Center for Curriculum Development[2] to achieve a learning process in which the individual can develop his full potential.

Dr. Glasser believes that the fear of failure inhibits learning, and that the task of teachers should be to instill in students feelings of self-worth. He says that schools should stop labeling children as failures and give them a grade of "pass" only upon mastery of the standards established for a course. Dr. Glasser uses class meetings to make students think and value themselves and others. Students and teacher sit together in a circle to discuss in a non-judgmental way questions relevant to the students, pertaining to the subject, the class, an individual or the world outside. He finds that these meetings give motivation in a way that grades never could.

Two years ago the Kenston Foreign Language Department stopped recording failure. Students who do not complete the course may repeat or the course will be erased from their record. Only a "pass" is recorded. Dr. Glasser told us in May that he knows of no other language classes graded this way, and Mr. John Long of CCD says that he knows of no other school using their method without grades. We should like to hear from others with similar experiences.

The emphasis of the multi-media method of CCD is on the discovery and thinking, vital aspects of individual development. A brief description of the method will show how the teacher's role is that of guide. Emphasis is on learning, not teaching; although the teacher's skill in setting up learning experiences is of utmost importance. Students are immersed from the first day in foreign-language situations. Answering carefully structured questions, they discover for themselves the meaning of words and the grammatical structure of the language. The use of filmstrips depicting typical cultural situations makes possible explanations of dialogue without any need for English. Dialogues are not memorized; students learn to think in the target language. Once the students can fluently manipulate the language within the context of the pictured situation, the teacher creates opportunities for the students and himself to express their own thoughts, feelings, and ideas in meaningful interaction.

Essential to this kind of learning is the willingness to risk making mistakes. We used class meetings to build up the necessary trust level within the group. In the meetings the students and teacher have the opportunity to express concerns and successes, sharing their experiences in an atmosphere that is not judgmental. There is no "right" answer and people are not "cut down" for expressing an unpopular idea. We discussed as a group individual problems such as what it felt like to be working without the normal incentive of a grade, the discipline and responsibility required of the students, the good feelings they have when they achieve and their frustrations in the process of learning.

Similar meetings were the key to setting up the non-graded program. First, the teachers began meeting frequently to critically examine our program, our successes and failures. Each one is involved in the decision-making as each change is made. The department chairman has taken great care to avoid any teacher's having the feeling that anything was being imposed on him.

When we eliminated the mark of failure in September, 1969, we began a series of class meetings to let students express their feelings on the question of whether they could learn without grades. After the consensus was finally reached that it was a workable proposition, many students became so supportive that they were able to help convince the parents to give their support.

The meeting with parents was astonishing. There were over 400 parents and students, the largest attendance ever at an educational meeting in our high school of only 700. It was evident that parents had real concerns as to college entrance requirements, class standing, and motivation. We had anticipated the questions and had a panel consisting of a college professor (a parent), our freshman guidance counselor, the foreign language teachers, and student volunteers to present the program and address the concerns. We answered to the effect that foreign language was removed from the competition for class standing, motivation was by success and involvement, and colleges were proving mostly favorable or tolerant. The success of that meeting is still reflected in parental approval of our program.

After only two years of working without grades and one year with the multi-media materials, it is impossible to have any statistical measure of success. We teachers, however, and visitors to our classes are impressed by the language proficiency of our students. They are speaking far better than ever before. They like working without grades and think that they can learn better without that kind of worrying pressure.

References

1. Glasser, William, Schools Without Failure, New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
2. The Center for Curriculum Development, The Chilton Company, 4th & Walnut Streets, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Mrs. Beverly Wattenmaker,
Department Chairman & Spanish Teacher
Mrs. Virginia Wilson, Spanish Teacher
Kenston High School
Chagrin Falls, Ohio

The Stanford Conference on Individualization of Instruction in Foreign Languages May 6-10, 1971

This conference, ably organized and conducted by Howard Altman, brought together a large number of high school teachers and college "experts" from every region of the United States. While awaiting publication of the conference recommendations and possibly of its proceedings, it may be of interest to outline briefly the major impressions gained by at least one of its participants.

(1) Individualization is a growing nation-wide phenomenon.

(2) There is a great deal of disagreement about the precise nature and scope of individualization. Some equate it with self-pacing or programming of materials, others conceive it more broadly, including, for example, students determining their own personal learning goals.

(3) Individualization in a given school or school system is sometimes initiated from the top (administration), sometimes from the bottom (teachers, seldom students). At the top the rationale may be philosophical (a cynic might say, rhetorical) or pragmatic, e.g., the use of individual learning packets where no live teacher is available. At the bottom the motivation is usually pragmatic, i.e., concern with the retention of large numbers of students in foreign language learning sequences.

(4) In discussing individualization, teachers, and even the "experts," are finding it very difficult to turn their attention away from the materials to the learner.

(5) One of the most urgent tasks in this field is to find a proper balance between students performing individualized learning tasks in isolation and their having an opportunity for a communicative use of language.

(6) Serious evaluation is lacking.

(7) Unlike ten years ago, hardware is not a live issue.

(8) Individualization of a foreign language program cannot be isolated from schoolwide administrative philosophies and practices, such as scheduling and grading.

(9) At its best, individualization in the classroom is "humanization" and"personalization" which implies both skills and attitudes on the part of the teacher. Accordingly, individualization must be extended into teacher training programs as well.

(10) Complete, commercially available "individualized learning materials" are somewhat far away in the future. For the next few years most teachers will have to rely on designing their own individualized materials for their students. (This may be a blessing in the disguise of a chore.) During this interim period a great deal of duplication of efforts could be prevented by efficient communication between schools where individualization has been implemented and others where teachers are about to embark upon such a venture.

There is little doubt that the coming years will show important growth, numerical and qualitative, in individualization. The Stanford Conference was an excellent first step in the direction of understanding--and controlling--this new development.

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Washington Foreign Language Program
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John Dewey High School: Individualization in an Inner City School

John Dewey High School is the first non-graded high school in the New York City school system. The school was opened in September of 1969 with an initial enrollment of 1000 students. The maximum proposed enrollment for the school is 3000 students which we will reach next year.

The school is based on the principle that every student should be required to achieve a reasonable mastery of an area of knowledge before he may advance. We encourage acceleration and enrichment, reduce the penalty of failure by not using the traditional grading system, and stimulate effort. We believe that every student should advance at his own rate and the responsibility for learning is placed on the student, where it belongs. The school is intended for students of all levels of ability, not for a special group.

The five-period-per-week lockstep was broken by the implementation of modular scheduling. The day is divided into 22 modules of 20 minute duration. The schedule came about through common agreement between the chairmen and the principal for a program that offers the most effective instruction in terms of distribution of time. Our programming is done by computer. The services are supplied by Brooklyn College. Every teacher teaches five classes and in addition serves 25 modules per week in the resource center.

Another unique feature of our school program is that the school year is divided into five 7 week cycles of approximately 35 days. At the end of each cycle, the child is rated and based on his mastery of the objectives of the course, he is either moved ahead into the next phase or he is retained for reinforcement. Because of the total reorganization of the school every seven weeks, the planning for each successive cycle is condensed into approximately two weeks time. In essence, every 7 weeks there is a rebirth in our school and the students feel that they are beginning fresh again, most often with a different teacher, and this adds enthusiasm to their outlook. It should also be noted that most of our students are carrying as many as 8 subjects each cycle.

Individual progress is achieved by the seven week reorganizations. The student who has not mastered the objectives of the course is not subjected to more complex tasks by advancing because the other students in the class are moving ahead. Our grading system is neither numerical nor letter equivalent. Our students are rated "Mastery", "Mastery With Condition", or "Retention for Reinforcement". The student who is rated "M" moves ahead into the next phase of work. The "MC" student also moves ahead but the teacher writes a prescription for him in which she lists his weaknesses and suggestions for removing these deficiencies. The "R" student also receives a prescription form but he is not moved ahead. The prescription form serves as the basis of the work the student does during the next 7 weeks. Retention is only for seven weeks rather than for six months or a year as is done in other New York City high schools.

The learning activities are, by and large, teacher directed. The teacher is free to break up the time blocks when his classes meet into a variety of activities. At times classes are programmed into the language laboratory. We have not yet broken out into the "open classroom" atmosphere because the teacher needs about one month for observing the learning habits of his students and in our system of cycles, this is not feasible. There are various levels of independent study and they can all be observed in operation at John Dewey. The lowest form of independent study is that of "leisure" where the student does nothing constructive with his time. This would be followed on the hierarchy by "homework" where the student goes to the resource center to do his assignment either by himself or with the assistance of the teacher who is assigned to the center or one of the student teachers. We also have a group of advanced students in foreign languages who have volunteered to serve as tutors in the resource center during certain modules. The next form of independent study would be "remediation" whereby the student, aware of a need for help with a particular objective, or advised by his teacher to work on a specific task, goes to the resource center for help. The highest form of independent study is that of enrichment or independent study of a course. We offer independent study in the four languages that we offer in formal classes: French, Hebrew, Italian and Spanish. We also offer programs in German, Latin and Russian. These students receive a DISK (Dewey Independent Study Kit) and they work on their own or get help in the resource center. Mastery of the objectives set forth in a DISK gives the student the grade of "MI" or Mastery in Independent Study and permits him to move ahead to the next phase of work.

It is in the resource center that we achieve differentiated staffing. Each teacher works an additional hour and forty minutes daily and this time is spent in the resource center. In addition to the licensed teacher, we have student teachers, our own advanced students who serve as tutors and para-professionals. Unfortunately the para-professionals who work in the language resource center are not trained in foreign languages but they facilitate the distribution and control of materials that are available for use there. These materials include copies of the textbooks that are used in our classes, supplementary textbooks that are used as reference or resource materials, language newspapers and magazines, worksheets that have been prepared by the teachers and our "tape of the week" program. There is also audio-visual equipment in the resource center in the form of a tape recorder, a phonograph and a filmstrip viewer. Study carrels afford students privacy when they work. A copy of the student's prescription form is also kept in the resource center so that the teacher can give the student more meaningful assistance.

John Dewey High School is a school that is committed to experimentation and change. We are constantly looking for new means to make the educational system and the learning process more exciting, interesting and fruitful for our students.

Stephen L. Levy,
John Dewey High School
New York, New York

Note:
A more detailed description of Mr. Levy's program with outlines of schedules, etc., is available in Ronald L. Gougher, ed., Individualized Foreign Language Instruction: A Practical Guide. The Center for Curriculum Development, 401 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Procedural Steps in Individualizing FL Instruction

A current question of interest to many FL educators is that of how to individualize FL instruction. I would like to propose a strategy that appears to me general enough to be applicable to any school and specific enough to be spelled out in six easy steps. I refer to this solution as the Triadic Method of Least Resistance. Step 1. List the instructional areas in which you believe you have some degree of control. I would like to suggest the following seven general headlines:

A. The shape of the overall curriculum
B. Course content and materials
C. Classroom activities and assignments
D. Type of tests and their timing
E. Nature of grading system
F. Distribution of time and work modules
G. Opportunity for diagnostic and remedial activities.

Step 2. Get together with administrators and supervisors and discuss all alternatives that occur to you in these instructional areas in connection with the following four directions of change:

1. Ratio of student/non-student initiated acts
2. Specificity of student contract
3. Degree of self-pacing
4. Nature of student/teacher interaction.

Theoretically, you have a 7x4 matrix of 28 boxes each of which are independent of one another (see Table 1). For instance, for area A (The shape of the overall curriculum), the ratio of student initiated acts may be quite low, whereas it may be quite high in areas D or F. The degree of self-pacing may be substantial in area F and insignificant in area D. A specific contract may be drawn up between the students and the teacher in area D but imposed by the teacher in area B. By "nature of student/teacher interaction" I have in mind particularly two scales: (i) teacher as authority figure vs. teacher as tutor or facilitator and, (ii) high vs. low empathic understanding between student and teacher.

Step 3. Get together with the students and discuss these alternatives with them, noting whatever additional suggestions they may have.

Step 4. Make a list of possible changes within each of the 28 boxes and arrange them in a rank order of extent of departure from current practices such that the change in rank position 1 would be minimal and that in position 10 (say) would be fundamental, with 5 being "somewhat rocking the boat but not pulling down the roof over your head." You end up with a matrix list of 280 changes (10 changes within each of the 28 boxes). This grid of 280 change items constitutes the possible theoretical path of change. To determine the actual path that is possible for you, with your particular students and in your particular school at any particular time, figure out the path of least resistance as follows.

Step 5. Draw a line above the first change item in each of the 28 boxes which represents for you the point of psychological stress, that is a change that you cannot live with comfortably if you were to function under those conditions. In some boxes your stress point may be at rank 2, in others you may be courageous enough to go down to rank 6 or 7. You end up with 28 scores for yourself varying between 1 and 10 (if you used a ten-point scale). This is your psychological change profile. Now determine in a similar way the psychological change profile for your supervisor, and also for each of your students if you are committed to an advanced individualized instruction program, or, if you are working in a mass oriented environment, use the average student psychological change profile for the class. Determine the path of least resistance by computing a geometric average for the three psychological change profiles. This will give you the context specific instructional profile that is possible in your school at this time.

Step 6. Implement immediately all the change items in each of the 28 boxes that fall above the line of the path of least resistance.

And Presto!--you are well on your way towards an individualized program. A cautionary note: it should be good practice to recompute the path of least resistance at the beginning of each semester.

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Footnotes

[1]Beginning September 1971, with the Department of Psychology, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822.

An expanded version of Dr. Jakobovits article, too, can be found in Gougher, Individualized Foreign Language Instruction. CCD, 401 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

News and Notes

1. All issues of this newsletter will be available on the ERIC-MLA materials list in New York, 62 Fifth Avenue.
2. The Center for Curriculum Development, 401 Walnut Street, Philadelphia is publishing a collection of essays and a large bibliography on Individualized Foreign Language Instruction. It is available at a very low cost.
3. Newbury Publishing Company, Rowley, Massachusetts is publishing the Stanford Conference Report on Individualized FL Instruction. It is now available and is edited by Altman and Politzer. Both editors of this newsletter participated and contributed.
4. West Chester State College will offer a 3 credit graduate course in individualized foreign language instruction, Summer, 1972, for two weeks (July 10-July 21). Any teacher interested should contact the FL Department or Professor Gougher for further information. Deadline for application is April 30, 1972.

5. The Britannica Review of Foreign Language Education, Volume III (ACTFL), contains one chapter devoted to reviewing the state of individualized foreign language instruction in 1970.

6. The editors wish to thank all the many journals helping to advertise and promote this free newsletter. Please copy any articles for use in reprints and inservice institutes, and do send any pertinent information to us.